

VZCZCXRO5484

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHSK #0983/01 3341441
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 301441Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6680
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1742
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000983

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY POL/ECON REPORT - November 30, 2007

[¶1.](#) The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Civil Society

- Blacklisted Musicians Meet Chief Ideology Officer (para. 2)
- Three Poles Expelled from Belarus (para. 3)
- Business Activists Jailed (para. 4)
- Family Describes Kozulin's Imprisonment (para. 5)
- MPs Meet with Opposition (para. 6)
- Opposition Party Elects Chairperson (para. 7)
- Opposition Leader Searched at Airport (para. 8)

Domestic Economy

- FEZ Output Up 21.6 Percent (para. 9)

International Trade

- Prime Minister Meets with Iranian Executives (para. 10)

Quote of the Week (para. 11)

Civil Society

[¶2.](#) Blacklisted Musicians Meet Chief Ideology Officer

Several blacklisted rock musicians met with Chief State Ideology Officer Oleg Proleskovskiy November 21. Proleskovskiy called the meeting to discuss lifting the ban on the musicians, to enlist their participation in a concert to be aired on state-owned television, and to have the bands agree not to perform at opposition-sponsored events. The musicians assert that they did not accept Proleskovskiy's offer and are committed to writing music, not engaging in politics. Since 2003 several rock bands have been banned from legally performing in Belarus due to their overt criticism of Lukashenko and his policies.

[¶3.](#) Three Poles Expelled from Belarus

Three Polish coordinators for the international project "Dialogues with Neighbors" left Belarus November 23 after authorities cancelled their visas and issued deportation orders. The Poles arrived in Gomel November 21 to conduct a five-day workshop for students, but were ordered to leave Belarus just two days later. Officials cited the Poles' failure to comply with the stated purpose of stay in Belarus.

14. Business Activists Jailed

A Minsk judge November 29 sentenced Aleksandr Talstyka and Ruslan Lutsenka to ten and seven days in jail, respectively, for violating rules governing the organization of mass events. The two were arrested while passing out leaflets at a shopping center promoting a rally planned for December 10 to protest new government hiring restrictions. The trial took place behind closed doors, with relatives and activists barred from the courtroom. Mr. Talstyka is a member of the unregistered organization "For Free Development of Enterprise" which applied to Minsk authorities for permission to hold the rally.

15. Family Describes Kozulin's Imprisonment

After visiting her father Aleksander Kozulin in prison for his birthday November 25, Olga Kozulina described his condition to the media. She stated that her father suffers from drowsiness and headaches, that prison administrators refused to allow her to provide him with food, and that prisoners are pressured not to communicate with Kozulin. Outside the Minsk prison police dispersed a crowd marking Kozulin's birthday, briefly detaining four opposition activists. In a message to his supporters, Kozulin thanked those who sent him birthday greetings and demonstrated at the prison.

16. MPs Meet with Opposition

Three members of Parliament's House of Representatives met with constituents in Brest November 26 after an opposition-sponsored signature campaign to force the meeting. The discussion focused on recent social benefits cuts, labor contracts, and price hikes. Local United Civic Party activist Nikolay Kovsh expressed dissatisfaction with the results of the meeting, asserting that the

MINSK 00000983 002 OF 002

MPs failed to address the issues. Kovsh said opposition members would request more meetings with MPs in other regions of the country.

17. Opposition Party Elects Chairperson

The Belarusian Social-Democratic Party Narodnaya Gramada (BSDP-NG) held its founding convention in Minsk November 25 with delegates electing Nikolay Statkevich chairperson. Delegates also adopted the party's charter, and passed a resolution criticizing Belarus' authoritarian regime, welcoming closer ties with Europe, and calling for immediate release of political prisoners.

18. Opposition`=jNcSd the Second Congress of European Leftist Parties.

Domestic Economy

19. FEZ Output Up 21.6 Percent

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, companies in Belarus' six free economic zones (FEZs) produced USD 1.2 billion worth of products and services in the first nine months of 2007, a 21.6 percent increase over last year. Resident companies exported USD 709 million worth of goods in the period, with Russia accounting for 77.8 percent of that figure. There are 249 companies currently operating in the zones. Foreign investment in the zones, excluding banks, totaled USD 277 million.

International Trade

10. Prime Minister Meets with Iranian Executives

Prime Minister Sergey Sidorskiy met with executives of automobile manufacturer Iran Khodro in Minsk November 28 to discuss the expansion of the Unison car assembly plant. Iran Khodro has

expressed interest in buying a 40-percent stake of the Belarusian-British facility, which has been assembling Samand cars using kits supplied by Iran Khodro since 2006. About 2,000 Samand cars are projected to roll off of the Belarusian plant's assembly line this year. The parties also discussed the possibility of launching a Belarusian-Iranian subway car manufacturing project.

11. Quote of the Week

Economist Sergei Balkin, describing his views on what's wrong with the small-business climate in Belarus:

"To say that presidential small-business initiatives are hindered by bureaucrats seems a bit naive to me. Unfortunately, there haven't even been any real initiatives coming from him. Businesses don't really need support as much as they need an absence of absurd restrictions."

Stewart